



türkiye ekonomi politikaları araştırma vakfı

Turkey-Greece Dialogue Process

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Greek Prime Minister George A. Papandreou's speech at the Turkish Ambassadors Conference in Erzurum has triggered a new debate on Turkish-Greek relations once again. Although he gave reciprocal messages of friendship and peace with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Papandreou's statements have clearly shown that Greek approach towards problems between the two countries has absolutely not changed. Besides all that Papandreou's Erzurum visit is deemed important to keep rapprochement process between the two countries alive.

The both sides had vividly expressed their political will to develop mutual relations during Prime Minister Erdogan's Greece visit in May 2010. Moreover 21 agreements had been signed in the fields of tourism, energy, environment, trade and fight against illegal immigration. Hence Turkish-Greek relations have virtually entered a new era. A fresh and softening breeze has started to blow in Turkey-Greece relations. In fact Turkey is trying to take constructive steps to convert Mediterranean and Aegean into seas of peace. Greek Prime Minister Papandreou's statements have revealed that Athens is also aware that improving relations with Turkey is of Greek interest, too. However Papandreou's statement at the Ambassadors Conference in Erzurum saying that as long as occupation of Cyprus continues Turkey will never be able to become an EU member has pointed to the fact that a healthy level on Ankara-Athens dialogue line has not been reached yet.

Cyprus and Aegean are the two fundamental problems to be overcome in Turkish-Greek relations. If these problems are solved through dialogue the solution to other issues will be easier. Nevertheless, there are a dozen deadlocks on the way to a solution to the Cyprus and Aegean issues.

The fundamental obstacle in the way of a solution to Cyprus issue is that Greece considers Turks as a minority and occupiers on the Island. Therefore Athens has the view that Turks cannot have totally equal right with Greek Cypriots in Cyprus. Greek Cypriots came to negotiations table accepting a bicomunal model however they have never mentioned that they will accept two equal communities with all aspects. On the other hand European Union has also complicated the solution to Cyprus issue by making Greek part of Cyprus an EU member without settlement of the Cyprus issue which is one of the biggest mistakes of Brussels' foreign policy. The countries opposed to Turkey's EU membership have been hiding behind the Cyprus issue for years. Furthermore European Union itself supports its members in controversial issues. In this kind of an atmosphere Greek Cypriots are encouraged to be unconstructive and Turkey and Cypriot Turks are forced to make compromises.

As far as the Aegean issue is concerned it has four different problems in itself. Determination of sea and continental shelves, extent of coastal waters, control of airspace and Greek armament of the Aegean islands are these four problems. Greece is constantly worried about expanding its rights in the Aegean. Since Greeks consider the Aegean completely as their own sea, it ignores Turkey's rights and interests in the sea. Thus Greece sees a solution of the Aegean issue in an expansion of its coastal waters beyond 6 nautical miles. Just for a reminder Greece has ratified a law to expand its coastal waters from 6 nautical miles to 12 nautical miles in 1995. Whereas expansion of Greek coastal waters in this manner leaves most of the riches of the Aegean in Greek control and could create more difficulties for the Turkish ships sailing between the Mediterranean and Aegean seas. Ankara and Athens adopted a policy of shelving the Aegean issue for a while.

The latest developments point to the fact that the Aegean issue has been taken unshelved and started to be negotiated. In the Ambassadors Conference in Erzurum Papandreou gave the messages that if the Aegean issues are not resolved they could go to International Court of Justice.

Papandreou might have reiterated the rooted thesis of Athens on the issues of Cyprus and Aegean due to internal politics of his country. Besides that Papandreou's participation in the Ambassadors Conference in Erzurum is obviously a goodwill gesture by itself. Even then a mentality change and constructive steps are needed to be taken by the both sides for solution of the problems between Turkey and Greece. Otherwise a dialogue between Ankara and Athens will be nothing but a dialogue of the deaf.

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